

Quail

Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry



Quail utilize woodlands with interspersed open pine and/or hardwood forests, with grass, weeds, scrubby growth and small fields, and plenty of seeds. They prefer to nest in one to two year old grassy cover and stay close to edges of clearings. Weedy fallow agricultural fields bordering woods also attract quail, partly because of the seeds and insects found there. Harvest timber in small blocks or narrow strips; use prescribed fire; and plant favored foods.

Locate food plots of 1/8 to 1/4 acre every 10 to 20 acres near cover. Favorite foods include browntop or German millet, bicolor and Korean or Kobe lespedeza, grain sorghum, cowpeas, soybeans, partridge peas and buckwheat. Disk in strips 15 to 30 feet wide, alternating disked and undisked strips every 3 years and fertilize with 200 - 250 lbs./ac 12-24-24. Do not mow or disk during nesting season (April - August). Burn plots either every two years, or half one year and half the next. It is also beneficial to burn fields and under pine stands (should be at least 30' tall – usually 10 to 15 years old) every 3 to 5 years on a rotational basis. Fire clears away dead grass and encroaching brush, rejuvenates desirable food and cover, and creates the open conditions preferred by quail. Obtain a burning permit from the local Forestry Division office, and ask for advice about the conditions under which to burn.

Fencerows and wood margins can be enhanced by planting and/or encouraging growth of fruit and seed bearing plants, such as blackberry, grape, sumac, poison ivy, dogwood, blackgum, cherry, redcedar and oak, especially sawtooth oak.

Help with quail habitat can be obtained through your regional TWRA office, local NRCS office, and through the Tennessee Chapter of Quail Unlimited, 423-470-0009.

When planting cover for quail, turkey, rabbits and other grassland wildlife, consider using Native Warm Season Grasses (NWSG), such as a mix

of eastern gamagrass, sideoats grama, big bluestem, little bluestem, indiangrass and switchgrass. (These should not be confused with low-valued sage grass or invasive Johnson grass.) NWSG are harder to establish than the conventional tall fescue, but are far better for wildlife. They also make better summer forage for livestock, providing twice the weight gain for yearling steer summer grazing, and produce better hay than does Kentucky 31 fescue. NWSGs respond well to fire after three growing seasons. Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency can provide the use of specialized drills for better planting success than conventional cyclone seeders.

NWSGs are given preference in government cost share programs. Contact NRCS about their Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and the latest on Farm Bill wildlife information.

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